



Steward Health Care System
Centers for Pain Management

Frequently asked questions about the psychology of pain

Q. What is psychological therapy?

A. Chronic pain can have profound psychological effects, including feelings of hopelessness, anger, sadness, and even despair. These feelings can interfere with your ability to perform your job or your normal daily activities.

Psychological therapy can help you to cope with the effects of pain on you and those around you. There are also specific psychological techniques that can actually help to reduce pain.

Q. What can a psychologist do for my physical pain?

A. Pain is a "whole person" experience. Most people experience pain physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. Pain can inhibit a normal productive life: it can limit your ability to concentrate, participate in physical activities and enjoy social interactions. Psychological evaluation and treatment can help many individuals develop specific skills that relieve the suffering of pain and thus increase their quality of life.

Q. What happens during a psychological evaluation?

A. During your psychological evaluation, we hope to gain an understanding of your situation so that we can provide you with some relief from the psychological consequences of your pain. A psychological evaluation is an efficient way of obtaining the necessary personal and historical information to assist you in getting effective medical care and pain relief.

As part of the initial consultation, you will be asked to complete several psychological tests and questionnaires. Combined with a personal interview, psychological testing helps you and your physician understand and plan the best possible multidisciplinary treatment.

Professional recommendations are normally made after the initial evaluation is completed. We will discuss with you the results of your psychological evaluation and your individualized treatment recommendations prior to your agreement to enter treatment at the Steward Centers for Pain Management.

Q. Are patients ever concerned that a psychological evaluation implies that their pain is imagined?

A. Some patients are concerned that the psychological evaluation might imply that their pain is imagined rather than felt; *this is not the case*. In fact, pain that is delusional cannot be alleviated through psychological treatments. Physical pain is normally recognized by the brain and, thus, has many effects on your well-being. It is these effects that we hope to identify during the psychological evaluation.

Q. What psychological techniques are used?

A. Psychological therapy offered at the Steward Centers for Pain Management addresses both the physical and the emotional suffering associated with pain. We offer psychotherapy in both individual and group settings. Specific techniques include:

Psychophysiological techniques

- **Biofeedback/relaxation training:** Many patients benefit from learning how to control their responses to chronic pain. Biofeedback and relaxation training teach you how to release the tension and anxiety that often make painful physical conditions more excruciating.

Behavioral Techniques

- **Self-monitoring:** Most patients will be asked to keep a diary of their pain, observing how pain levels increase or decrease over time. By monitoring your pain, you can develop an appreciation of your ability to control and manage levels of pain using skills you have learned.
- **Paced progressive increases in activity levels:** By encouraging the slow and steady introduction of or increase in activity, we can help patients start to feel an improvement in their quality of life. Pain can be very debilitating, and the Steward Centers for Pain Management is committed to helping patients improve their social, occupational and recreational activity levels.

Cognitive Techniques

- **Self-hypnosis and visual imagery:** These techniques help you control pain that interferes with your occupational and sleep patterns. Through self-hypnosis, many patients report reduced levels of pain and an increased ability to concentrate on meaningful pursuits.
- **Emotional management:** Over time, pain can be very distressing, leading to depression, anxiety and social turmoil. Psychological therapy can assist you in reducing the emotional distress associated with chronic pain. By learning these techniques, your pain can be transformed and your suffering reduced.
- **Are sessions with the psychologist confidential?**
In almost all situations, you control who has access to the information disclosed during your interview sessions with your psychiatrist. There are some unusual exceptions to this rule, however, and you need to be aware of them. By state law, information regarding child abuse, elder abuse or the need to protect you and others from physical harm or immediate danger must be reported to the appropriate persons.

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